



City Hall Diary: The Arts Make Downtown

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, April 16, 2007

When I was a child, my family and I would patronize the downtown. I fondly remember attending shows at the Center for the Performing Arts and the San Jose Symphony. Like many families, we would walk to Original Joes after the shows.

The arts act like candles for the downtown, shedding light on the wonderful museums, restaurants and other amenities that draw people out of their homes and to the city center. Whether it's theater or music, the arts brings people to the downtown core. Without the arts, our downtown would have ceased to exist.

I am thankful that my parents introduced me to corduroy clothing and the arts as a child. Those early experiences have led me to continue to patronize the arts as an adult. The past two weekends, I have attended four theater venues: San Jose Repertory Theater, San Jose Stage Company, City Lights Theater and Comedy Sportz Improv. The patrons thoroughly enjoyed themselves at all of the shows. However, the caveat to the evening was that after the performance, the patrons could not stay at the theater and enjoy an after-the-show cocktail.

Although we have many nightclubs and bars for "twenty-somethings" in the downtown, we lack options for "grownups" to hang out. I propose that we promote a different entertainment option with on-site full liquor licenses for theater venues. I believe that an on-site liquor license would increase revenues for the downtown theaters and provide a place for patrons to gather after a show. There is more profit in a cocktail than a theater ticket, so having a lounge with seating and music would be a great business opportunity and a nice alternative to a nightclub.

Currently, several theater companies are facing uncertainty because their lease agreements are expiring. I propose that San Jose work with its theater companies and listen to their needs. Assistance with relocating the theaters in the downtown by issuing permits in a timely manner would be a step in the right direction.

I also propose that San Jose considers locating theater companies closer together to create an "arts district" that will help promote other

small businesses, like restaurants, and produce a “feel” for our downtown area. Other cities have succeeded in creating something similar.

Historically, the arts have been the differentiator for downtown. We must work to ensure that the arts not only remain downtown, but that they grow and thrive there too. Investments in the arts reap returns both in quality of life and economic growth. Arts stimulate consumer spending and attract creative people who tend to start new companies that provide employment and add to our tax base.

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